

February 20, 2009
Appropriations Committee
Testimony regarding Regional Action Councils and Funding for Prevention

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ingrid Gillespie and I am Director of the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council (LFCRAC). Regional action councils (RACs) are mandated under the Connecticut Statute 17a-671 to develop and implement plans that include identifying needs and gaps, developing resources and designing programs to address gaps in the substance abuse continuum. The continuum includes prevention, intervention, treatment and aftercare.

To meet the requirements under this mandate, RACs collect substance abuse consumption and consequential data and then develop plans and resources to address such. Today, I am here to specifically talk about tobacco trends and needs and RACs role in addressing these.

According to the Campaign for Tobacco –Free Kids, smoking rates for high school students in Connecticut are 21% which is slightly higher than the national average of 20.5%. However, these state rates do not necessarily reflect the sub regional rates as noted by Regional Action Councils. In addition, they do not incorporate the increase in number of incidents reported by RACs on the increasing use of smokeless tobacco.

However, RACs are able to show that smoking rates for youth in their regions have decreased due to correlative relationship with strategic prevention and intervention strategies. Some of these strategies include co-coordinating anti-tobacco campaigns, organizing education opportunities for youth and parents at elementary, middle school and high school levels, collaborating with DMHAS and local police to implement tobacco compliance checks and then publishing those merchants *who did not* sell to youth in our local newspapers, providing technical assistance to local prevention councils wanting to address smoking at the local level and working with local retailers with the intent of reducing the size of tobacco advertising on their storefronts.

RACs also support efforts to address the extremely high smoking rates for persons living with serious mental illness and those with substance use disorders. Specifically, LFCRAC is an active member and contact for the Smoking Cessation Supports Initiative known as SCSI. This initiative is a working group of people in recovery, mental health and substance abuse treatment providers and advocates from southwest and northwest Connecticut. We have been working together since October 2005 to address the smoking prevalence and impact among persons in recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders by promoting a culture change around this issue and advocating for cost effective smoking cessation supports. Recently, we were successful in advocating for 1.2 million dollars from the Tobacco and Health

Trust Fund to be used for smoking cessation supports for persons living with serious mental illness.

Based on the successful prevention and intervention efforts and the need to continue to address smoking rates amongst youth, adults and specific populations as noted previously, we ask that you consider allocating the \$500,000 set aside in SB 847 for prevention programs to the Regional Action Councils. This money would not *increase* our budget but rather make up for the reduction of RAC funding in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ingrid Gillespie

Director, Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council (LFCRAC)